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Written on July 30, 2015 at 6:00 am by [svanderwerff](#)

[Swimming with Sharks: Navy Physician Remembers the Indianapolis Disaster Part I](#)

Filed under [Navy History](#), [Navy Medicine History](#), [U.S. Navy](#) {[no comments](#)}

By Capt. Lewis Haynes (1912-2001)



The survivors remained at sea for four days maneuvering through a gauntlet of sharks, intense heat, starvation and dehydration.

Editor's Note. July 30, 2015 marks the 70th anniversary of a harrowing event in naval history. On July 30, 1945, [USS Indianapolis \(CA-35\)](#) was returning from a secret mission (transporting the atomic bomb) to Tinian Island when it was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine and sank into the Philippine Sea. The survivors remained at sea for four days maneuvering through a gauntlet of sharks, intense heat, starvation and dehydration. Of the ship's original contingent of 1,196 crewmembers only 316 would survive this ordeal. Among these was the ship's medical officer, Lt. Lewis Haynes. Years later, then retired Capt. Lewis Haynes (1912-2001), sat down with the BUMED History Office and shared his

memories of surviving the [Indianapolis](#) tragedy. The following is an excerpt from this session.(1)

[As we were returning from Tinian, Cdr. Johns H.] “Jack” Janney, the navigator, said that Japanese submarines had been spotted along our route and we were going to pass them during the night about midnight. I was pretty tired because I had given the whole crew cholera shots all day. I remember walking through the warrant officer’s quarters. They had a poker game going and asked if I wanted to join in and I said no, I was tired. I then went to bed.

I awoke. I was in the air. My room was lit up with a bright flash of light. I saw the bright light before I felt the concussion of the explosion that threw me up in the air almost to the overhead. The explosion was under my room which was right under Number 2 barbette. I had a lamp on my desk alongside me and it was in the air along with me. I hit the edge of the bunk, hit the deck, stood up and then the second explosion came and knocked me down. As I landed on the deck I thought, “I’ve got to get the hell out of here!” I grabbed my lifejacket and started to go out the door. There was fire in my room.

My cabin and [Lcdr. Kenneth I.] Ken Stout’s cabins shared a short little passageway the widths of our doors which we stepped into and then took two steps forward into the main passageway. As I started out the door, Ken said, “Let’s go.” He stepped ahead of me and I stepped into the passageway behind him and I was very close to him when he yelled, “Look out!” and threw his hands up. I lifted the lifejacket in front of my face, and stepped back. As I did, a wall of fire went “Whoosh!” It burned my hair off, burned my face, and the back of my hands. That’s the last I saw of Ken.



USS Indianapolis (CA-35) was returning from a secret mission (transporting the atomic bomb) to Tinian Island when it was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine and sank into the Philippine Sea.

I started out trying to go to the forward ladder and as I started to run forward. Right in front of the dentist’s room a lot of fire was coming up through the deck. The explosion had to find its way out and it went down through the various passageways in a big ball of fire. That’s when I knew I couldn’t go forward and turned and started to go aft. As I did, I slipped and fell, landing on my hands. I got third degree burns on my hands—my palms and all the tips of my fingers. I still have the scars. I was barefooted and the soles of my feet were burned off.

I got out to try to go forward to go up on the fo'c'sle deck and the deck was afire forward. Evidently the deck was ruptured.

The next escape route, was through the barbette, which was the 8-inch gun right outside my cabin. I looked in through the door and saw fire all around those shells.

Then I turned aft to go back through the wardroom. I was just two doors from the wardroom. I would have to go through the wardroom and then down a long passageway to the quarterdeck but there was a terrible hazy smoke and it had a peculiar odor. I couldn't breathe. I got to the wardroom and got lost. Things were all over the place. I kept bumping into lamps and what not and finally fell into this big easy chair. I felt so comfortable. I knew I was dying, but I really didn't care.

Then someone standing over me said, "My God, I'm fainting!" and he fell on me. Evidently that gave me a shot of adrenalin and I stood up and tried to find him but I couldn't. Somebody was yelling, "Open a porthole!" I can remember someone else yelling "Don't light a match!" All the power was out and it was just a red haze.



I-58, The Japanese sub that sank Indianapolis.

The ship was beginning to list and I went down to that side of the ship, got up on the transom and felt for a porthole. I found one already open. I thought it had been blown open by the explosion but I found out later that two other guys had gone out through it and had left a rope dangling. When I stood up on that transom and stuck my head out the porthole, it was like putting your head in the deep freeze. I gulped in some air and as I looked down I saw water rushing into the ship beneath me. I thought about going out the porthole into the ocean but could see papers floating around in the water below. So I knew I couldn't go in that way.

Then this thing hit me in the face and I brushed it away. And it hit me again and I grabbed it. It was the rope the other Sailors had used that came from a floater net just above. I pulled on it and it was solid so I went through the porthole like you deliver a baby—one arm first and then the other. Holding on to the rope, I turned on my back and gradually worked my way out so I could stand up on the rim of the

porthole and just reach the floater net above. I then crawled across the floater net stood up and went back to the port hanger, which was my battle station. There were a lot of casualties back there.

It was still going along at least 10 knots. They couldn't get word to the engine room to turn off the engines. The engineer hadn't gotten word from the bridge so he kept plowing ahead like this. It just filled up like a bucket.

I remember fainting one time trying to take care of a patient who was on a cot. I fell across him and he shoved me off and I stood up again. We were trying to put dressings on people. We were starting to give morphine to people who were badly burned when an officer came up and said, "Doctor, you'd better get life jackets on your patients."



When it finally sank, it was over a hundred yards from me. Most of the survivors were strung out for a half a mile or a mile behind the ship.

All the men were at their stations at general quarters. We got a whole bunch of life jackets and went back down and started to put them on the patients. I remember I was putting it on a warrant officer. I never used his name because I didn't want his family to know. His skin was hanging in shreds and he was yelling "Don't touch me, don't touch me." I kept telling him we had to get the jacket on. And I was putting the jacket on when the ship lurched right over. And he just slid away from me, he and all the patients and the plane on the catapult all went down in a big, tangling crash to the other side, which was now the low end of the ship. I was standing right alongside the lifeline and I grabbed it and climbed through. And by the time I did, the ship was on its side.

I stood up on the side of the ship and slowly walked down the side. Another kid came and said he didn't have a jacket. I had an extra jacket, I handed it to him, and he put it on. He was ahead of me. He went to jump and he hit something on the side of the ship and fell in the water. I went down and jumped into the water which was just fuel oil.

When I jumped in the water and grabbed hold of my life jacket and held myself, I didn't want to get sucked down so I kicked my feet to get away. And then the ship rose up like the ceiling there. I thought it was going to come down and crush me. And the ship kept leaning out away from me, the aft end rising up and leaning over as it stood up on its nose. And as the screws went by, I vaguely remember seeing someone standing on the screws but I can't be sure.

The ship was still going forward at probably three or four knots. When it finally sank, it was over a hundred yards from me. Most of the survivors were strung out for a half a mile or a mile behind the ship.

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<http://www.med.navy.mil/bumed/nmhistory/Pages/Oral-History.aspx>

Endnotes:

- (1) [Herman, Jan. Oral history with Capt. Lewis Haynes, MC, USN \(ret.\), June 5, 12, and 22 June 1995.](#)

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Written on July 31, 2015 at 6:00 am by [svanderwerff](#)

[Swimming with Sharks: Navy Physician Remembers the Indianapolis Disaster Part II](#)

Filed under [Leadership](#), [Military Medicine](#), [Navy History](#) {[no comments](#)}

By **Capt. Lewis Haynes (1912-2001)**



When daylight came we began to get ourselves organized into a group and the leaders began to come out, and they knew I was the doctor, I began to find the wounded and we began to find the dead.

Editor's Note. Any "Jaws" fan can tell you that the U.S. Navy has its own unique history with sharks. In what is known in movie parlance as simply the "[Indianapolis scene](#)," fisherman Sam Quint (Robert

Shaw) tells Brody (Roy Scheider) and Hooper (Richard Dreyfuss) a horrifying shark tale of the crew of [USS Indianapolis](#), a Navy ship torpedoed and sunk on July 30, 1945. In the four days before their rescue, some 883 Sailors would die in the Pacific Ocean. According to Quint, most were “taken away” by sharks making it one of the greatest shark feeding frenzies in history. But what is the real story? Capt. Lewis Haynes, was one of the [Indianapolis](#) survivors and later related his harrowing experiences as a survivor in an oral history. The following is an excerpt of this session.(1)



According to Quint, most were “taken away” by sharks making it one of the greatest shark feeding frenzies in history.

Being in the water wasn’t an unpleasant experience except that it was black fuel oil and you got it in your nose, and you got it in your eyes. As the ship went up, I thought I would be sucked down with it but it had just the opposite effect. Because the ship went down so fast because of the forward momentum, the air burst out of the compartments and there were explosions of air that turned you end over end and kept blowing us all farther away. I went tumbling ass over teakettle in the fuel oil and water. And the ship was gone. And suddenly it was very quiet.

As the ship rolled, the swimmers all walked down the side like I did. The captain and a lot of the men and perhaps those people on the afterdeck—the gunnery crew that was up there—when the ship rolled, they all fell off on that side. And as it rolled over all the life rafts and all the floater nets went off on that side, opposite to our side. [Capt. \[Charles B.\] McVay](#) and 10 men had two life rafts and two floater nets between them. (2) And another group had four or five rafts and floater nets.

And when the ship went down so fast and the air blew out of the compartments like explosions, they went that way and we went this way and never the twain would meet. We never saw them again. When you’re in the ocean at sea level and there are big waves you can’t see very far.



Capt. Charles McVay and 10 men had two life rafts and two floater nets between them. And another group had four or five rafts and floater nets.

We started to gather together. We all looked the same, black oil all over—white eyes and red mouths. No personalities at all. You couldn't tell the doctor from the boot seaman. Everyone swallowed fuel oil which made everyone sick. And then everyone began vomiting. And it was in your eyes, it was in your nose. Later, when the sun came up the covering of oil was a help. It kept us from burning. But at that time, I could have hidden but somebody yelled, "Is the doctor there?" And I made myself known. From that point on—and that's probably why I'm here today—I was kept so busy I had to keep going. But without any equipment, from that point on I became a coroner.

And this was midnight and most of the men were probably dehydrated to start with because they'd been asleep. A lot of them hadn't had fluid for some time. And they began to get very thirsty. And that was the big problem I had as time went on. Trying to keep them from drinking saltwater.

A lot of the men were without life jackets. The kapok life jacket is designed with a space in the back.⁽³⁾ Those who had life jackets that were injured, you could put your arm through that space and pull them up on your hip and keep them up out of the water. And the men were very good about doing this. Those with jackets supported men without jackets. They held onto the back of the jacket, put their arms through there and held on floating in tandem.



A lot of the men were without life jackets.

When daylight came and we began to get ourselves organized into a group and the leaders began to come out, and they knew I was the doctor, I began to find the wounded and we began to find the dead. And when we got to the dead, the only way I could tell they were dead was to put my finger in their eye. If their pupils were dilated and they didn't blink I assumed they were dead. We would then laboriously take off their life jackets and give it to men who didn't have jackets. In the beginning I took off their dogtags and said "The Lord's Prayer" and let them go. Eventually, I got such an armful of dogtags I couldn't hold them any longer. Even today, when I try to say "The Lord's Prayer" or I hear it, I simply lose it.

When the sun came up it reflected off the fuel oil and was like a search light in your eyes that you couldn't get away from. And everyone got photophobia. So I had all the men take their clothes off and we tore them into strips and tied them around our eyes to keep the sun out.

When first light came we had between three and four hundred men in our group. I would guess that probably seven or eight hundred men made it out of the ship.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father,
Who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy Name.
Thy Kingdom come.
Thy will be done
On earth,
As it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
As we forgive our debtors.
Lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory forever.
Amen.

The second night, which was Monday night, we had all the men put their arms through the life jacket of the man in front of him and we made a big mass so we could stay together—Capt. [Edward L., USMC] Parke and the others swam around the outside and we supported one another. Some of the men could doze off and sleep for a few minutes. We kept the wounded and those who were sickest in the center of the pack, and that was my territory.

There was nothing I could do but give advice, bury the dead, and save the life jackets, and try to keep the men from drinking the saltwater when we drifted out of the fuel oil. When the hot sun came out and we were in this crystal clear water, you were so thirsty you couldn't believe it wasn't good enough to drink. I had a hard time convincing the men that they shouldn't drink. I can remember striking men who were drinking water to try and stop them. The saltwater acted like a physic. The men would get diarrhea, then get more dehydrated, then become very maniacal. In the beginning, we tried to hold them and support them while they were thrashing around. And then we discovered we were losing a good man to get rid of one who had been bad and drank. As terrible as it may sound, towards the end when they did this, we shoved them away from the pack because we had to.

The water in that part of the Pacific was warm and good for swimming. But body temperature is over 98 and when you immerse someone up to their chin in that water for a couple of days, you're going to chill him down. So at night with everybody tied together we would take the strings from the leg part of our jackets which normally kept the jacket from riding up, and we would tie it to the man next. Everybody was tied together and they all had severe chills. And after they were chilled, they ran a fever and then they all became delirious.



It was amazing how everyone would see the same thing. One would see something, than someone else would see it. They all saw the island. They also saw the ship just beneath the surface, and the scuttlebutt [water fountain] down there.

In fact, there were mass hallucinations. It was amazing how everyone would see the same thing. One would see something, than someone else would see it. One day everyone got in a long line. I said, “What are you doing?” Someone answered, “Doctor, there’s an island up here just ahead of us. One of us can go ashore at a time and you can get 15 minutes sleep.” They all saw the island. They also saw the ship just beneath the surface, and the scuttlebutt [water fountain] down there. And they would dive down to get a drink of water and the salt water killed them. They could see it. You couldn’t convince them. Even I thought I saw the ship once. I fought hallucinations off and on. Something always brought me back.

I saw one shark. He was about this long and he went around in front of me in the afternoon. I remember reaching out trying to grab a hold of him. I thought maybe it would be food. However, when night came, things would bang against you in the dark or brush against your leg and you would wonder what it was. But honestly, in the entire 110 hours I was in the water I did not see a man attacked by a shark. However, the destroyers that picked up the bodies afterward found a large number of those bodies—in the report I read—56 bodies were all mutilated by fish. Maybe the sharks were satisfied with the dead; they didn’t have to bite the living.



I saw one shark. He was about this long and he went around in front of me in the afternoon.

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Endnotes:

- (1) [Herman, Jan. Oral history with Capt. Lewis Haynes, MC, USN \(ret.\), June 5, 12, and 22 June 1995.](#)
- (2) Capt. (later Rear Adm.) Charles B. McVay, USN was the skipper of the [USS Indianapolis](#).
- (3) Kapok— a fibrous vegetable material made from the seeds of the ceiba tree and used for the filling of lifejackets.

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Written on August 3, 2015 at 6:00 am by [svanderwerff](#)

[Swimming with Sharks: Navy Physician Remembers the Indianapolis Disaster Part III](#)

Filed under [U.S. Navy](#) {[no comments](#)}

By Capt. Lewis Haynes (1912-2001)y



Editor's Note. *The following is the last installment of the story of Capt. Lewis Haynes.(1)*

I think we saw five or six planes. You know it's very hard to see people in the water. And they weren't looking. We all splashed. The first plane that went over, I remember Cpt. Parke [USMC] having everyone splash their feet but they never saw us.

When you're in a long period of suffering, and I've seen this in patients since, this becomes your way of life. We weren't too excited about it. And then he began to drop things and our main thought was water. He dropped lifejackets with canisters of water but they ruptured. So we went back to what we were doing. Then Lt. Marks showed up with his PBY and he dropped rubber life rafts, which we tried very hard to inflate.(2)



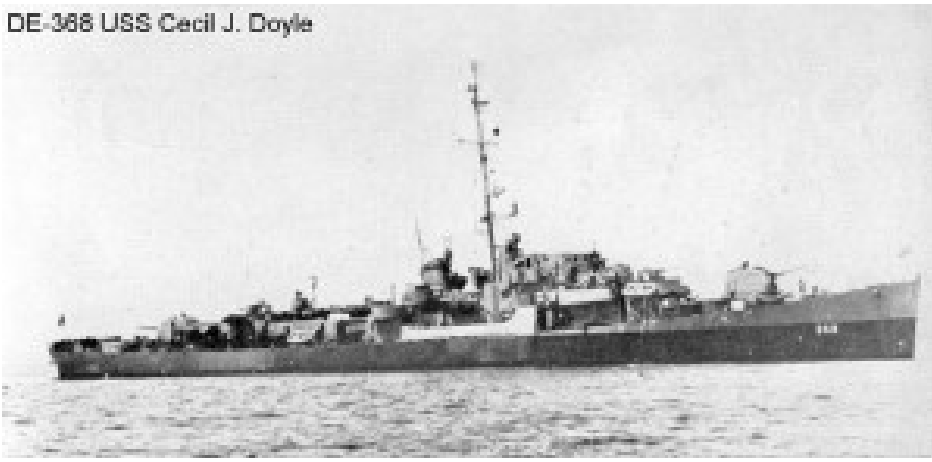
I watched him circle and suddenly he made an open-sea landing. This took an awful lot of guts. He came in with that big plane and hit those big swells, went back in the air and splashed down again. I thought he'd crashed but he came taxiing back.

We put the sickest people aboard and the others hung around the side. I found a flask of water and it had a 1-ounce cup with it. I doled out the water, passing the cup down hand to hand. Not one man cheated. And I know how thirsty they were. Not one cheated. It was very hot and the sun was beating down.

We had to take off our kapok jackets to get in the raft. It was so hot we went back over the side into the water where we belonged anyway. Towards the end of the day, just before dark, I found a kit for making fresh water out of salt water. I tried to read the instructions and they didn't make any sense. I tried to make it and we tasted it. It still tasted like saltwater to me and I didn't want to take a chance I just threw it into the ocean and then went to pieces.

I watched him circle and suddenly he made an open-sea landing. This took an awful lot of guts. He came in with that big plane and hit those big swells, went back in the air and splashed down again. I thought he'd crashed but he came taxiing back. I found out later he was taxiing around picking up the singles who were floating. If he hadn't done this, I don't think we would have survived. But he stayed on the water during the night, revved up his engines, and turned his searchlight up into the sky so the *Cecil Doyle* (DE-368) could find us. The *Doyle* aimed its searchlight into the sky in return. And the ship was able to come right to the scene and begin picking us up. At that point we were right at the end.

DE-368 USS Cecil J. Doyle



The Doyle aimed its searchlight into the sky in return. And the ship was able to come right to the scene and begin picking us up. At that point we were right at the end.

The *Doyle* came up and we were in the rafts. They had a big net down over the side. Some of the sailors came down the side of the netting and pulled our rafts up alongside. With this big ship hovering over us, I remember one of the men in the raft alongside of me yelled up at the ship, “Have you got any water on board?” Somebody up on the fo’c’sle deck said, “Yes. We’ve got all the water on board you can drink.” And he yelled back, “If you ain’t got no water go away and leave us alone.”

Anyway, they put a rope around me; we were too weak to climb up. And they hauled me up. I remember bouncing off the side of the ship till they got me up on the deck. When they tried to grab hold of me I remember saying, “I can get up!” But I couldn’t. Two sailors grabbed me under my arms and dragged me down the passageway. By the wardroom pantry, someone gave me a glass of water with a mark on it and would only give me so much water. I drank it and when I asked for more, he said that was all I could have this time. As I was drinking, [Lcdr.] Graham Claytor came and asked me what ship I was from.⁽³⁾ And I told him we were what was left of the [Indianapolis](#). Much of that time is all a haze to me.



We put the sickest people aboard and the others hung around the side.

The next thing I knew, I was sitting in a shower. I remember Corpsmen or seamen cleaning off my wounds, trying to wash the oil from me, and putting dressings on my burns. I remember trying to lick the

water coming down from the shower. They put me in a bunk and I passed out for about 12 hours and then I woke up and was more alert. I recall the first bowel movement I had after I was picked up. I passed pure fuel oil. The other fellows found the same thing.

The *Cecil Doyle* took us to Peleliu. We were taken ashore and put into hospital bunks. I remember they came in and got our vital statistics; none of us had dogtags. We all had discarded them because they were heavy. And they got our names and next of kin, and photographed all of us in our bunks for identification purposes. They changed our dressings. Some of the men got IVs. They didn't give me one. While there I began to eat a little and get some strength back.



The USS Doyle took us to Peleliu. We were taken ashore and put into hospital bunks.

Then after 2 or 3 days there at Peleliu, someone came in and said that I was going to Guam. The next thing I knew, they loaded me on a stretcher and hauled me out. I remember being on an LCI lying on the stretcher trying to keep the sun out of my eyes while waiting my turn to be hoisted on the hospital ship [USS *Tranquillity*, AH-14].

The commanding officer of the ship, a friend of mine, was [Bart Hogan](#).(4) Bart came in and said, "I know you don't feel well but you're going to have to go before the Inspector General. I'm going to send a Corpsman in and I want you to start at the beginning and dictate everything you can remember about what happened because as time goes on you're going to forget and things are going to change." So I dictated every day off and on for 3 days on the way to Guam. When I'd get tired I'd fall asleep and then I'd wake up and he'd come back.



Cmdr. Eugene Owen examines Dr. Haynes wound dressings at Naval Hospital Guam, while Capt. Charles McVay watches.

When we landed, Bart gave me a copy of what I dictated and I took it when I went before the Inspector General's office. I told my story and answered their questions and then I gave them this report unedited and said "Here it is. This is probably as accurate as I can be." And that document is the file at the Inspector General's office. And all the people who wrote books about the [Indianapolis](#) used it.

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Endnotes:

- (1) [Herman, Jan. Oral history with Capt. Lewis Haynes, MC, USN \(ret.\), June 5, 12, and 22 June 1995.](#)
- (2) The survivors of the [Indianapolis](#) were first spotted by a PBY under the command of Lt. Adrian Marks and notified the captain of the destroyer USS *Cecil Doyle* (DD-368). Before the Doyle arrived on the scene, the PBY dropped off life rafts.
- (3) Claytor (1912-1994) was skipper of the *Doyle* and later became Secretary of the Navy during the Jimmy Carter administration.
- (4) [Capt. \(later Rear Adm.\) Bartholomew Hogan, MC, USN](#) would later serve as Navy Surgeon General from 1955-1961.

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